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### Avoiding Mistakes

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With the sprawl of urban development and the adaptability of many wildlife species, there has been an increasing demand from the public for professional assistance with human/wildlife conflicts. There are a number of mistakes or accidents that can occur and that should be avoided. Here we'll take a look at potential areas of concern in dealing with these "common wildlife control mistakes" and some ways to avoid making them.

What's There? One of the first things that you need to determine when dealing with any wildlife call is the problem animal species that may be present. You must be familiar with the potential wildlife species that may be encountered in your area. In addition, you should be able to identify the evidence that each of these different animals may leave behind such as tracks, droppings, nest material, burrows, gnawing marks, etc.

The property owner who places a call may be able to provide a valuable description of what they have been hearing or seeing. Being able to determine if the customer has been hearing scratching vs. running sounds or activity during the day vs. evening may provide valuable insight into determining the type of "unknown varmint" that's in the wall or attic space. This is especially true in situations where there is limited accessibility to the area where activity is occurring. Failure to interview a customer can result in an incomplete investigation as well as additional work. You should also ask the right questions so that you can obtain information in order to develop a plan of action to address the pest that may be present.

There have been more times than I'd like to admit that I did not make a thorough enough initial inspection. Missing a travel path or secondary potential entry point may result in initial failure to solve a pest concern and require additional trips on site to properly remove or exclude a targeted wildlife species. Most wildlife intervention work does not provide an opportunity for recurring revenue so if you miscalculate the time and materials necessary to address the concern then it can really hit home when looking at bottom line profitability.

Why They're There. As PCOs, the idea of an animal's need for food, water, shelter and ideal climate should be a commonly known concept. Just as these points are true for insects and rodents, they are also applicable to essentially all urban wildlife species that may be encountered. Failure to identify and eliminate a competitive attractant food source such as bird feed, cat food and compost piles can result in extended time on a job and lack of success.

If you are not familiar with different types of construction and the potential points of entry used by different wildlife species then you once again may be on a job site longer than you originally

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intended. Here are some important tips to keep in mind as you perform wildlife control work.

1. Realistic expectations. We all normally want to close a sale when we are out at the home or business of a potential customer. If there is a wildlife issue you must remember that the recurrence of certain wildlife species can be hard to predict. The time taken to educate the customer is important so that they don't have higher expectations than you will be able to deliver.

2. Sealing them in or out. If there is a question as to whether an animal is using an entrance or den hole and you are considering sealing or filling in the hole, you should always be positive that the entrance is inactive. This can be accomplished by placing some loose wadded paper or even a few sticks in front of the hole or opening. If you don't take the time to do this you may be faced with damage to the interior of a structure or a dead animal within the structure that must be located due to deterioration of the carcass.

3. Trap selection. There can be nothing more frustrating in the use of cage traps than to go out to an account and find thrown — but empty — traps. Animals such as raccoons and ground hogs are capable of turning over cage traps that may then provide them an escape. In certain situations, failure to properly secure a cage trap to a large board can result in an animal escape. When setting cage traps on roofs, failure to use a board under the traps can result in damage to the roof through the efforts of a trapped animal (such as a raccoon) attempting to "dig out." You must also use the right size trap for your target animal. In many cases it can be difficult to get an animal to investigate a cage trap once it has been "educated" and escaped from a poorly set or an improper sized cage trap.

4. Bait Selection. It is important to have a variety of preferred baits and lures available when trapping wildlife. Selection of the best available lure will often greatly impact your success when dealing with certain species of wildlife. If traps are tied up catching non-target animals or the targeted animal isn't interested in the bait or attractant, you may be unsuccessful in solving the problem. If traps or bait are "contaminated" with pesticide or other odors then it is doubtful that you will have consistent success when using those traps.

5. Time of Year. You must take into consideration the time of year that you are called out to an account and how this affects the wildlife species. For example, beavers normally feed heavily on green vegetation during the mid-summer months and many beaver lures are of minimal attractiveness. Given the same site three or four months later the beavers likely will have shifted their feeding preference towards woody vegetation and actively investigate many attractive lures due to the approaching breeding season. In addition, removal of an adult female squirrel that is nesting in an attic may also leave behind young in a nest that should be located and addressed. Failure to investigate this can result in the death of the young squirrels in the attic space and a whole new set of problems.

6. The Right Equipment. Making do and getting by with what you have has to occur at times. If you try to use the wrong type of equipment to get the job done this can often lead to failure. If you fail to place a sufficient number of trapping devices this may also extend the time necessary to solve the problem.

7. Handling the Public. This year I was at a residential development within the city limits that had hired an individual to trap beavers that were cutting trees and damming the spillways on several of the neighborhood lakes. Apparently this "wildlife professional" was unsuccessful with his trapping efforts and took it upon himself to come back out in the evenings to shoot beavers. The neighborhood association decided to fire him and get someone else that could help them. In this case the shooting was illegal because the development was inside the city limits — as well as dangerous because homes surrounded the lakes. These actions created a highly visible activity that not only hurt the reputation of this individual but could also cast a negative image on others who are truly wildlife damage control professionals.

8. Non-Target Animals. In providing any type of service work involving wildlife, failure to make a concerted effort to maximize a professional work standard can have serious negative consequences. You must remember that your work may often be carried out "in view of the public's eye." You need to always conduct your work like someone is watching over your shoulder. In reality, there may be one or more individuals that will question the need for you to exclude, relocate or remove wildlife species from any given place. You should always be prepared to address concerns from the public in an informative and professional manner.

9. Wildlife Capture and Release. In many states it's illegal to release certain species of wildlife due to their status as a pest or the danger associated with the spread of rabies. In these cases the captured animals must be euthanized (humanely killed). You should be equipped to handle euthanizing animals as required by law or have arrangements made in advance with an animal shelter or veterinarian to handle this for you.

You don't always need to trap, catch or kill an animal in order to be providing a valuable service for your customers. Many customers simply want the animals away from their homes and do not want to see them harmed. In some situations you can educate your customer and it may be possible to modify the attractive conditions. You may also be able to simply exclude an animal to solve the wildlife conflict. By doing this you have prevented the need to destroy or relocate the animals. When an animal naturally relocates within its "home range" then its ability to survive increases. If an animal is relocated to a new site then it may have difficulty finding suitable feeding and denning areas. The release site may have a balanced population of that wildlife species already present and additional animals may adversely impact that balance.

If you upset a customer or violate state, local or federal wildlife laws nothing good will come from it in the long run. Once again, if you operate your business as a professional this will contribute to a positive reputation for your business.

10. Safety. Another common mistake that can have serious consequences can occur when working with tools or equipment. Insufficient or faulty equipment that is in poor working condition can have negative consequences. One of the more important tools that are used almost on a daily basis is a ladder. A ladder that is of insufficient height, weight capacity or in poor condition can be a "death trap." Another safety concern that is also frequently overlooked is proper footwear. Hard-sole cleated sole boots worn while walking on a roof provides poor surface contact. This can lead to a slip or fall resulting in injury. In work environments that involve heights the professional should also be equipped and properly trained in the use of fall protection devices.

11. Attics. Due to the habits of many wildlife species associated with homes, gaining access to inspect the attic space is often necessary. These attic spaces may be fully floored, partially floored or totally unfloored. In all cases the wildlife control professional should always watch where he or she is placing his or her feet and watch for loose boards while traveling in attics. Consideration should be given to wearing a "miner's type" head-lamp vs. a hand-held flashlight in order to keep your hands free. If work requires that access must be made to the unfloored portion of an attic then a few 1- by 10- or 1- by 12-inch boards can make a difference in safely being able to work in these areas. Stepping from one roof rafter to another is a good way to eventually end up stepping or falling through a ceiling.

12. Crawl spaces. It is occasionally necessary to enter into crawl spaces for inspections. In these situations a bump hat, coveralls and gloves should all be standard equipment. It is also advisable to wear eye and respiratory protection, especially when working where there may be an accumulation of animal waste.

13. Roofs. The wildlife control professional should always wear proper footwear and avoid climbing onto any roof surface without having proper safety equipment in place. It is better to walk away or come back to a job site than it is to be carried away. In certain situations the use of a platform lift,

scaffolding or a knuckle boom device may be necessary in order to safely gain access to the area (s) where trapping or exclusion services need to occur. Prior to using these pieces of equipment you should receive training on their use. In some cases serious consideration should be given to hire a qualified subcontractor to either operate a piece of machinery or to provide the exclusion services under your guidance.

14. Animal Contact. Almost all types of wildlife have some means of defending themselves. Failure to wear the proper protective gear while handling, removing and/or releasing animals can result in a possible contact situation. The more you directly handle wildlife then the greater your potential is for a bite or scratch to occur. If you are working with wildlife removal and exclusion you should always maintain a current rabies preexposure vaccination. You should also have a good first-aid kit in your vehicle.

15. Odor Release. In dealing with skunks you should always inform your customer that there might be a potential for an odor release. If you capture a skunk in a cage trap it is normally possible to remove the traps containing the animal without having it spray. Using specially designed traps that enclose the trapped skunk, covering the set trap or carrying a tarp with you so that you can cover a trapped skunk prior to moving can aid in preventing skunks from spraying.

16. Stinging Insects. During the summer months it is likely that you will encounter nests of stinging insects. The key to avoiding getting stung is to constantly be on the alert for the presence of nest sites. You must remember that if you encounter a nest of wasps or hornets while you are on a ladder the potential for injury is greater from falling or jumping off than from getting stung. It is advisable to have several aerosol cans of wasp and hornet spray on your service vehicle.

Conclusion. To avoid making mistakes while conducting urban wildlife interdiction it is essential that you are properly prepared. Your knowledge of the animals and conditions that you may encounter is invaluable. You must also have the proper equipment and tools to get the job done in a safe and effective manner. You must strive to increase your knowledge and consistently practice good safety procedures.

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